

**United States Department of the Interior**  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.

## 1. Name of Property

Historic name: Little Chief

Other names/site number: Sinopah (current name)

Name of related multiple property listing:

Glacier National Park Multiple Property Listing, Amended (2016)

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

## 2. Location

Street & number: Two Medicine Lake, Glacier National Park

City or town: East Glacier Park State: MT County: Glacier

Not For Publication: ☐ Vicinity: ☒

## 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this x nomination     request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property x meets     does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

    national     x statewide     x local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

X A     B     C     D

Signature of certifying official/Title:

Date

State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property     meets     does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting official:

Date

Title :

State or Federal agency/bureau  
or Tribal Government

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#### 4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- ☐ entered in the National Register  
☐ determined eligible for the National Register  
☐ determined not eligible for the National Register  
☐ removed from the National Register  
☐ other (explain:) \_\_\_\_\_

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Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

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#### 5. Classification

##### Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- Private: ☒
- Public – Local ☐
- Public – State ☐
- Public – Federal ☐

##### Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

- Building(s) ☐
- District ☐
- Site ☐
- Structure ☒
- Object ☐

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**Number of Resources within Property**

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>                    </u>	<u>                    </u>	buildings
<u>                    </u>	<u>                    </u>	sites
<u>          1          </u>	<u>                    </u>	structures
<u>                    </u>	<u>                    </u>	objects
<u>          1          </u>	<u>          0          </u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register   1  

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Recreation and Culture: outdoor recreation

Transportation: water-related

**Current Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Recreation and Culture: outdoor recreation

Transportation: water-related

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## 7. Description

### Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Other: carvel-planked wooden vessel

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**Materials:** (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: Hull: WOOD  
Keel/stem: WOOD  
Roof: CLOTH/CANVAS  
Stem-band/Guard: METAL-Steel  
Windows: GLASS, METAL-Aluminum

### Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

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#### Summary Paragraph

Operating in Glacier National Park since its construction in 1926, the 45-foot long by 12-foot wide carvel planked cedar on oak frame vessel *Little Chief* took its name from a prominent mountain along the south shore of St. Mary Lake where the boat was originally launched. The Great Northern Railway commissioned and owned the *Little Chief*, operating it as transportation for its customers from the St. Mary Chalets up the lake to the Sun Point Chalets. The boat was rechristened *Sinopah* sometime during the 1940s when it was relocated to Two Medicine Lake where it continues to operate for scenic cruises every summer.

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#### Narrative Description

The *Little Chief* (renamed *Sinopah* in the 1940s) is operated by Glacier Park Boat Company, providing scenic boat cruises and transportation to trails on Two Medicine Lake in Glacier National Park. The two-mile-long, 200-foot deep lake sits at an elevation of 5,164 feet and is surrounded by multiple glacially carved peaks and features.

*Little Chief* is a United States Coast Guard-registered (USCG) 45-foot long by 12-foot wide traditional carvel planked cedar on oak frame fastened with silica bronze screws vessel

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constructed in 1926.<sup>1</sup> USCG-rated to carry 49 passengers and two crew members, the boat measures 45 feet long with a beam of 10 feet 6 inches. It is registered at 13 gross tons and 10 net tons. The seams are primed with linseed oil and caulked with cotton under a layer of Sika-flex seam compound.<sup>2</sup> The plumb stem and keel are built of fir and the stem band is steel.

The planks of the hull run perpendicular to the frames in a single layer. Each plank varies in length and is roughly 1 ¼-inches thick. The top row of planks are capped by a laminated fir guard that extends out past the hull sides by 3 inches and runs the length of both port and starboard sides. The guard has an exterior band of steel that acts as a rub rail when the boat is moored. The guard is attached to the top ends of the frames and connected to the covering board built of fir and running both sides of the boat and across the bow. The covering board on the bow includes an oak mooring bollard with brass cleats where the bow line attaches, a brass clamshell vent, the fuel fill, and an aluminum tube mount for the man overboard crane. Due to the tumblehome shape of the hull toward the stern, there is a short rub rail approximately a 1 ½ feet above the waterline protecting the hull sides from docks and other vessels.

The ladder enters the bow from the port side just forward of the helm windshield. It is wood construction (fir) with aluminum handrail. The bow deck is plywood, as are the ceiling walls. A double door hatch in the bow deck opens to the engine compartment. The cabin is accessed via a step and single companionway door.

The superstructure consists of a single cabin space. The deck or roof of the vessel is original and constructed of fir deck beams and carlings supported by oak deck posts that run into dead wood inside the hull. The deckhead, or overhead, was originally 2-inch cedar tongue-and-groove boards, but was replaced at some point with plywood attached on top of the beams and carlings. The outer deck is finished with canvas and painted with a dark blue waterproof acrylic roof coating. Mahogany drip molding runs the length of both sides of the deck above the windows. The interior seats, ceiling and sole are covered with oil-based paint. The deck beams and window frames are covered with varnished mahogany inside and out. The roof coating is acrylic snow seal. All port and starboard windows are aluminum framed, sliding sash with tempered glass; the forward windshield is double pane safety glass and the aft window is tempered glass. Ten rows of plywood bench seating run the length of both sides of the cabin with an aisle down the center. Life jacket storage is built under the seats. The entire aisle sole is made of removable

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<sup>1</sup> Traditional carvel planking denotes planks butted edge to edge with a small gap left above and below each plank filled with cotton and covered with caulking. The planks in a carvel style boat swell once submerged, tightening the seams. All planks are individually shaped to follow the curvature of the hull. Part of this shaping is planing a curve on the interior and exterior of the plank so that it fits the curvature of the frames and the lines of the boat giving the exterior of the hull a smooth appearance. Oak frames are bent to shape by steaming in a steam box until pliable then quickly clamped into place before cooling down and drying out; a good source for the definition/description of carvel planking is: Howard I. Chapelle, *Boatbuilding: A Complete Handbook of Wooden Boat Construction*, W.W. Norton and Co.: New York, 1969.

<sup>2</sup> Historically, material used for caulking included cement and tar; more recently, pliable synthetics, like SikaFlex are used, especially for boats that spend much of the year out of the water. As the planks dry and shrink, the seam compound is pliable enough so as not to fail.

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plywood pieces with access to the bilge. The bilge pumps, high water alarm, copper engine exhaust, and shaft are all accessible in the bilge.

The helm is forward of the bench seating on the port side built under the windshield. The dash is mahogany and includes the Perkins gauge cluster and throttle shifter console. The helm unit holds a 22-inch diameter black plastic Ross steering wheel connected to a Ross Steering gear column that connects and manipulates a length of galvanized piping to the steering system under the stern seating. It appears likely this is the original steering unit. High water and engine fire alarm panels and the PA system all connect below the dash.

The Perkins Sabre M65 engine is located under the bow deck.<sup>3</sup> There is a bulkhead forward and aft of the engine compartment lined with fire-proof foam padding. A single shaft runs from the engine, 30 feet in total length, through the bilge and into the keel and out below the waterline. It is connected to a 4-blade 19 x 16 pitch bronze propeller forward of the rudder. The 12-volt electrical system is regulated by the engine driven alternator and battery located below the bow deck. The 12-gallon fuel tank is also located in the forward end of the engine compartment space.

The hull sides are painted with glossy white urethane paint while the boot-stripe is black and the underside glossy red urethane paint. The covering board is painted dark blue in urethane paint while spar varnish protects the transom and decorative trim. Light brown urethane paint covers the seats and ceiling. The overhead is semi-gloss white while the sole is dark grey. The canvas covering on the roof is coated with dark blue acrylic snow-coat matching the covering board.

### **Integrity**

The *Little Chief* retains excellent integrity.<sup>4</sup> The case for integrity of location, setting, feeling, and association are virtually inseparably entwined and remain exceptionally strong. The *Little Chief* continues to ply the same waters and serves in the same capacity within Glacier National Park that it did historically. The awe-inspiring landscape remains virtually unchanged allowing visitors to experience a nearly identical experience, feeling the same emotions, as when the boat was first constructed and used.

Integrity of design and workmanship are very strong. The historic design of the *Little Chief* is clearly evident as it presents nearly identically to when first constructed. Because repairs and

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<sup>3</sup> The original gasoline engine was replaced with a safer more efficient diesel engine mandated by the National Park Service and USCG in 1992.

<sup>4</sup> Per *National Register Bulletin 20, Nominating Historic Vessels and Shipwrecks to the National Register of Historic Places* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1985), p. 8: Decades of use in an often inhospitable environment necessitates periodic replacement of portions of some of the wooden components. Not unlike land-based resources that also require replacement of original fabric over time, the sheer nature of the environment to which boats and vessels are exposed ultimately results in similar replacement, only at an accelerated pace. Changes to a boat to continue operation historically or restoratively, and that are done with materials similar in composition, design, color, texture, and workmanship retain the historic character of the structure and do not affect the boat's integrity. Integrity continues through the retention of hull form, rig, use of materials, and craftsmanship.

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restoration work strongly followed the original design and material elements and were renewed in-kind following the same principles employed when the boat was first built, integrity of workmanship remains strong.

Despite years of service in the lakes of Glacier National Park, integrity of materials remains strong. Although some materials were replaced for maintenance during its historic use, these occurred to allow the boat to function in its original historic capacity. The deckhead, originally 2-inch tongue-and-groove boards, was replaced in the past with plywood attached on top of the beams and carlings. This will be rectified and returned to its original appearance within two years during maintenance roof work when the canvas roof covering will be replaced; at that time the plywood will be removed and exchanged with local cedar tongue-and-groove boards to reflect the original design. Original windows were replaced with aluminum frame glass windows into the original oak post frames; however, these replicate the originals. The original 200 horsepower gasoline engine was replaced with a safer more efficient 50 horsepower diesel motor mandated by the National Park Service and USCG.

### **Glossary Terms**

**Beam:** The beam of a ship is its width at the widest point as measured at the ship's nominal waterline.

**Bollard:** A bollard is a post on a vessel used for mooring.

**Carling:** Carlings run port to starboard and provide the structural support for the deck.

**Carvel:** Carvel built or carvel planking is a method of boat building where hull planks are fastened edge to edge, gaining support from the frame and forming a smooth surface.

**Ceiling:** A term applied to the planking or covering with which the inside of a vessel is sheathed.

**Companionway:** a set of steps leading from a ship's deck down to a cabin or lower deck.

**Deadwood:** Wood that serves primarily as filler between other structural members. A common place to find deadwood is between the keel and the upper keel or rabbet.

**Deck:** A deck is a permanent covering over a compartment or a hull of a vessel.

**Deckhead:** Sometimes called the overhead, the deckhead is the underside of the deck.

**Deck Beams:** Deck beams run forward to aft and provide the structural support for the deck.

**Deck posts:** Deck posts are the primary support for the deck structure.

**Garboard plank:** The lowest plank on a boat. Attaches to the bottom board, stems and ribs.

**Helm:** The steering apparatus of a ship.

**Mooring:** A mooring is any permanent structure to which a vessel may be secured.

**Plumb Stem:** The stem is the most forward part of a vessel's bow and is an extension of the keel itself. When the stem is perpendicular to the waterline it is "plumb."

**Sole:** The floor of the cabin or deck

**Superstructure:** The superstructure is the structure built on top of the hull.

**Tumblehome:** The tumblehome is the narrowing of a ship's hull with greater distance above the water-line.

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## 8. Statement of Significance

### Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- ☒ A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- ☐ B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☒ C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

### Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

- ☐ A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- ☐ B. Removed from its original location
- ☐ C. A birthplace or grave
- ☐ D. A cemetery
- ☐ E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- ☐ F. A commemorative property
- ☐ G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years



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**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Criterion A: Transportation

Criterion A: Entertainment/Recreation

Criterion C: Architecture (Naval Architecture)

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Period of Significance**

1926-1945

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Dates**

1926

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Person**

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

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\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Cultural Affiliation**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Architect/Builder**

John William Swanson

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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**Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph** (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

The *Little Chief* is eligible for listing under criteria A and C. Under Criterion A, the boat is eligible for its role it played, and continues to play, in the development of recreation within Glacier National Park. Even prior to its establishment as a National Park in 1910, boating occurred in the park area, both as a means of travel, and for recreation and sightseeing. The boating concession represented one leg in the development of the nascent recreational infrastructure of the park, serving as another means of luring tourists to the area. As an early representative of the first park-wide boating concession and its importance to the success of the concession and tourism within the park, the *Little Chief* is eligible under Criterion A. The *Little Chief* is also eligible under Criterion C as an excellent example of a carvel planked boat constructed using traditional boat-working techniques and materials by J. W. Swanson, an early influential boat builder both in and outside the park.<sup>5</sup> The history of boats in Glacier is inextricably entwined with Swanson. Swanson's *Little Chief* retains the vast majority of its original components and serves as an excellent representation of the boats that historically plied the waters of Glacier National Park. The few Swanson boats that remain in the park are significant, rare examples of a type of boat once common on American waterways from Florida's Silver Springs to the Wisconsin Dells.<sup>6</sup>

The *Little Chief* meets the Registration Requirements set forth in the Amended Glacier National Park MPS under the context for "Development of Recreation (Concession) Infrastructure in Glacier National Park (amended)—J.W. Swanson and the Development of Boat Concession Operations" and the "Historic Boats of Glacier National Park" property type. The Period of Significance conforms to the MPS cover context period.

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**Narrative Statement of Significance** (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

#### **A Brief History of the Glacier National Park Boating Concession**

For a detailed discussion about the boats and boating concessions at Glacier National Park, please refer to *Glacier National Park Multiple Property Listing, Amended (2016)*. The use of

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<sup>5</sup> Traditional techniques were employed both during the original construction of the boat and during its subsequent restoration. "Traditional" denotes the use hand planes and chisels as well as a steam box. Even though these vessels were constructed nearly a century ago, some power-driven saws would have been used similar to today.

<sup>6</sup> The historic significance of the boats to the Park was noted in a December 15, 1988 memorandum from National Park Service Maritime Historian Foster to the Chief Historian of the National Park Service. The memorandum indicated preparation of a Multiple Property Submission for the boats for listing in the National Register was a sound pursuit: memorandum on file at the Montana State Historic Preservation Office, Helena, MT.

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boats in Glacier National Park occurred even before the actual establishment of the park. Prior to the turn of the twentieth century, rowboats ferried visitors from Apgar to the upper lake facilities; these were soon replaced by a steam powered boat, which in turn was replaced by three gas-powered launches. It wasn't long until the realization that the utility of boats extended beyond transportation to recreation, such as sightseeing and fishing.

As the role of the Great Northern within the park expanded to include serving as the primary concessionaire, opportunities arose for the operation of boat-related businesses to serve not only transport-related functions (to places such as the newly constructed chalets), but also recreation-related activities. Although the Great Northern operated two launches on St. Mary Lake dedicated to transport between St. Mary Chalet and Going-to-the-Sun Chalet, with a third providing a recreational function, boating-related opportunities continued to exist within the park for those with the vision and skills to harness the potential.

In 1911, Frank Kelly and Orville Denny secured a boating concession to transport visitors from the stages at Apgar to the various lodgings at the head of Lake McDonald. The same year the two contracted with John William (J. W.) Swanson, a boat builder for the growing freight traffic along Flathead Lake. Kelly and Denny commissioned Swanson to construct the launch, *Ethel*, signaling Swanson's initial incursion into the boating business in Glacier. Four years later, in 1915, Kelly and John Lewis contracted out the *Lewtana* from Swanson. Swanson brought the boat from Flathead Lake, a monumental feat itself for the time, and added 10 feet to its length once it arrived at Lake McDonald.<sup>7</sup>

As Swanson's reputation continued to grow, the Glacier Park Hotel Company hired him in the late 1910s to operate and maintain the *St. Mary*, a 100-passenger launch, and the smaller 20-passenger *Glacier*. In addition, Swanson was contracted to construct another boat, the *Little Chief*, for use of visitor transport and cruises on St. Mary Lake.<sup>8</sup>

After three seasons working with the Glacier Park Hotel Company and its St. Mary Lake launches, Swanson set about developing his own boat concession on the lakes on the east side of the park. He wrote to Superintendent Walter W. Payne on November 4, 1919 with his prospectus: "It is my desire to maintain row boats for hire on Two Medicine Lake, St. Mary Lake, and McDermott (Swiftcurrent) Lake, as well as launches on Two Medicine Lake, during the coming season and a launch on Lake McDermott when facilities there permit."<sup>9</sup> A one-year contract was approved with the result that Swanson began operating his own boat concession in

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<sup>7</sup> This story is told by many sources, but Swanson gives a first person telling in the article by Phyllis Clark, "Cap'n Swanson—Boat Builder," *The Daily Inter Lake*, July 19, 1970.

<sup>8</sup> Multiple letters detail the business partnership between Swanson and the Glacier Park Hotel Co. Most notable are correspondence concerning the construction the launch, *Little Chief*, in 1926. "H. A. Noble, General Manager, Glacier Park Hotel Co. to R.R. Vincent, Asst. Superintendent," March 15, 1926, Series "Concessions," 900-02 Contracts and Permits, Unit 007, Glacier Park Hotel Company, Glacier National Park Archives, West Glacier, MT.

<sup>9</sup> J. W. Swanson to W.W. Payne, Nov. 4, 1919. Series "Concessions," 900-02 Contracts and Permits, Unit 006, Folder 4, Glacier National Park Archives, West Glacier, MT.

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the summer of 1920. The same year, Swanson instituted launch service on Two Medicine Lake; facilities associated with this operation included two boathouses and a pier.<sup>10</sup> While Swanson operated boats under his own concession between 1920 and 1938, two other concessionaires, Glacier Park Hotel Company and the Glacier Park Transport Company, also used boats he constructed.

It was during this period that Swanson embarked on a prolific period of boat-building launching seven boats over the next decade. Three of the boats, the *Wymufus*, the *Josephine*, and the *Grinnell*, all featured a white oak stem and frames, keel of deadwood fir, and planking made from local cedar.<sup>11</sup> The former served for pleasure and fishing cruises while the latter two served as visitor transport; none of these boats remain. According to Superintendent J.R. Eakin's Annual Report in 1921, the new vessel, *Wymufus*, at Two Medicine Lake "provided popular pleasure and fishing cruise trips to park visitors."<sup>12</sup>

The year 1926 witnessed the construction and launch on two of Glacier's east side lakes of two new 45-foot, 50-passenger vessels; the *Rising Wolf* on Two Medicine Lake and the *Little Chief* on St. Mary Lake.<sup>13</sup> The following year, the Glacier Park Hotel Company commissioned Swanson to build the *International* for use on Waterton Lake in Waterton Lake Provincial Park, north of the border.

The Glacier Transport Company, a transportation concession started in 1914, assumed the launches at Lake McDonald in 1929, and soon commissioned Swanson to construct one vessel to replace the entire aging fleet. The scuttling of the *Lewtana* in 1929, along with the rest of the Lake McDonald fleet, marked a change in how boats were used. Sightseeing becoming the number one priority as the automobile and the construction of roads in the park took their toll on the boat's usefulness and practicality to ferry visitors from one spot to another. In 1930, Swanson launched the *DeSmet* for the Glacier Transport Company on Lake McDonald; the *DeSmet* was used for scenic boat cruises with interpretive commentary; a role it continues to serve to this day. Three years later, he launched the 60-passenger, cedar plank on oak frame, *Chief Two Guns* to replace the *Grinnell* on Swiftcurrent Lake.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Holterman, Jack, "Boats in Glacier" (unpublished document, no date), GNPA, Ruhle Library, West Glacier, MT.

<sup>11</sup> J. W. Swanson, "Specification of 36 Foot Boats for Glacier National Park," Series "Concessions," 900-02 Contracts and Permits, Unit 006, Folder 4, Glacier National Park Archives, West Glacier, MT.

<sup>12</sup> J.R. Eakin, "Superintendent's Report 1921," Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1921.

<sup>13</sup> Department of the Interior. Transportation Permit, Jan. 1, 1926-Dec. 31, 1926. Series "Concessions," 900-02 Contracts and Permits, Unit 006, Folder 4, Glacier National Park Archives, West Glacier, MT; Superintendent Kraebel to D. R. Hull, January 12, 1927. Series "Concessions," 901-02 Permits, Glacier Park Hotel Company Launches, Unit 020, Glacier National Park Archives, West Glacier, MT. Applying for approval of "a new boathouse for the auxiliary launch *Little Chief* acquired last summer...".

<sup>14</sup> Letter from Superintendent E. T. Scoyen to Director NPS, Nov. 2, 1934. Series "Concessions," 900-05 Correspondence, Unit 011, Folder 4, Glacier National Park Archives, West Glacier, MT.

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By 1938, and wishing to end his tenure in the park, Swanson sold his boats and the NPS concession contract to Arthur Burch and Carl Anderson.<sup>15</sup> With their purchase, the local businessmen from Kalispell planned to operate the business in the same manner as Swanson. The price of \$25,000 included the NPS concession contract, the associated boats, boathouses and other equipment. Swanson assisted the two through the first summer in 1938.<sup>16</sup> The business, whose name changed to the Glacier Park Boat Company, has been owned and operated by the same family since that time.

Swanson returned to Glacier at the end of World War II, at which time he and Burch constructed *Big Chief*, a 45-foot cedar plank and oak frame vessel.<sup>17</sup> With the completion of the *Big Chief* in 1945, the *Chief Two Guns* relocated to Josephine Lake and the *Big Chief* assumed responsibilities on Swiftcurrent Lake until 1961 when it too moved to Josephine Lake, rechristened *Morning Eagle*.

Early in 1941, financial issues arose for the Glacier Park Hotel Company. The expense associated with maintaining its St. Mary fleet and the completion of the new bus system that operated on the Going to the Sun Road resulted in surrendering their preference rights for the launch service on St. Mary Lake in favor of Burch and Anderson.<sup>18</sup> By the end of World War II, Arthur J. Burch assumed full ownership of the Glacier Park Boat Company. Soon after, the *Little Chief* was purchased from the Glacier Park Hotel Company, moved to Two Medicine Lake to replace the *Wymufus*, and renamed, *Sinopah*.<sup>19</sup>

In 1953, Burch acquired the physical assets used with the launch service on Lake McDonald from the Glacier Park Transport Company, assuming control of the boat concession for the entire park.<sup>20</sup> In 1988, Art Burch Jr., Scott Burch, and Mark VanArtsdale and their wives assumed the concession contract for the Glacier Park Boat Company continuing the scenic boat tours and rental service Arthur Burch provided. As of 2010, Scott Burch and his wife Barbara are the sole owners of the Glacier Park Boat Company and its four Swanson vessels.

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<sup>15</sup> J. W. Swanson to E. T. Scoyen, April 9, 1938. Series "Concessions," 900-05 Correspondence, Unit 011, Folder 4, Glacier National Park Archives, West Glacier, MT.

<sup>16</sup> J. W. Swanson to Dept. of Interior, June 7, 1938. Series "Concessions," 900-05 Correspondence, Unit 011, Folder 4, Glacier National Park Archives, West Glacier, MT.

<sup>17</sup> Interviews with Arthur J. Burch's grandsons and current owners of the Glacier Park Boat Company, Art Burch, Jr. and Scott Burch. Fall 2014. Columbia Falls, MT.

<sup>18</sup> A. A. Aszmann to D. S. Libbey, March 6, 1941. Series "Concessions," 900-05 Correspondence, Glacier Park Hotel Company, Unit 015, Folder 3, Glacier National Park Archives, West Glacier, MT.

<sup>19</sup> Much of the Glacier National Park archival papers between the 1950s-1970s were lost. Interviews with Arthur J. Burch's grandsons, Arthur and Scott Burch helped fill in these gaps about how and why the Little Chief and Rising Wolf were moved and renamed.

<sup>20</sup> Hillory A. Tolson, Regional Director to Howard H. Hays, June 4, 1953. Series "Concessions," 900-02 Contracts and Permits, Glacier Park Hotel Company, Unit 007, Glacier National Park Archives, West Glacier, MT.

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### **The *Little Chief***

The 1920s witnessed a tourist bonanza in the park as thousands of wealthy Americans from the East Coast made Glacier National Park their summer playground. Boats and horses provided access for the extensive system of backcountry chalets and campgrounds; the addition of new, larger capacity boats to this important tourist and transportation cog yielded improved service for these early tourists. For J. W. Swanson, the summer of 1926 proved a banner year. He constructed and launched two new 45-ft., 50-passenger vessels; the *Rising Wolf* on Two Medicine Lake and the *Little Chief* on St. Mary Lake. The *Rising Wolf* operated as part of Swanson's concession contract providing the primary service alongside the *Wymufus* on busy Two Medicine Lake.<sup>21</sup> The *Little Chief* was commissioned by the Glacier Park Hotel Company to operate alongside their larger steam vessel *St. Mary* transporting guests from the St. Mary Chalets at the foot of the lake to the Going to the Sun Chalets toward the head of the lake. During the winter, the *Little Chief* was dry-docked in a boathouse along the south shore of St. Mary Lake below the St. Mary Chalets. The rail tracks leading into the water used to launch the *Little Chief* and some of the underwater structure of the original St. Mary Chalet dock still remain.

The *Little Chief*, along with all the vessels Swanson constructed for use in the park at this time were "built with heavy fir keel...oak stern and ribs and planked with cedar fastened with galvanized fastenings and of an exceptionally good sea boat model."<sup>22</sup> The *Little Chief* was one of seven similarly designed wooden vessels built by Swanson for operation in Glacier National park between 1920 and 1930.

After the end of World War II, *Little Chief* was purchased from the Glacier Park Hotel Company, moved to Two Medicine Lake to replace the *Wymufus*, and renamed *Sinopah*, for the pyramid-shape mountain rising from the head of the lake.<sup>23</sup> The *Rising Wolf* and *Sinopah* operated simultaneously until 1975 when the *Rising Wolf* was moved to Many Glacier to temporary fill-in after the *Chief Two Guns II* was rendered inoperable due to damage from an avalanche while in winter storage.<sup>24</sup> The *Little Chief* (*Sinopah*) has remained on Two Medicine Lake, operating for scenic cruises and hiker transportation every summer and spending every winter but one stored inside the Swanson boathouse that was originally built for the *Rising Wolf*.

During the winter of 1991-1992, the *Little Chief* (*Sinopah*) was brought back to Glacier Park Boat Company's workshop in Kalispell, Montana for a more thorough restoration than the usual seasonal upkeep performed in its boathouse on Two Medicine Lake. The nine-week restoration

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<sup>21</sup> Department of the Interior. Transportation Permit, Jan. 1, 1926-Dec. 31, 1926. Series "Concessions," 900-02 Contracts and Permits, Unit 006, Folder 4, Glacier National Park Archives, West Glacier, MT.

<sup>22</sup> J. W. Swanson, "Specification of 36 Foot Boats for Glacier National Park," Series "Concessions," 900-02 Contracts and Permits, Unit 006, Folder 4, Glacier National Park Archives, West Glacier, MT.

<sup>23</sup> Much of the Glacier National Park archival papers between the 1950s-1970s were lost. Interviews with Arthur J. Burch's grandsons, Arthur and Scott Burch helped fill in these gaps about how and why the *Little Chief* and *Rising Wolf* were moved and renamed.

<sup>24</sup> Built by Arthur J. Burch in 1961, *Chief Two Guns II* replaced the original *Chief Two Guns*.

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process only replaced aging materials with same materials employing the same construction methods and did not change the structure or appearance of the vessel.<sup>25</sup> A handful of hull planks revealed enough dry rot to warrant replacement. With a number of the hull planks off of the boat, access to the oak frames allowed for the replacement, or “sistering”, of a dozen cracked or rotting frames with new steam bent white oak. Finally, nearly all surfaces of the boat received fresh paint or varnish. It was also at this time that the gasoline engine was replaced with a safer, high efficiency diesel engine.

The continued maintenance of the boats, while time-consuming and expensive, results from the life-long relationship between the Burch family and the boats of Glacier National Park. The decades-old relationship has instilled in the family an understanding of the importance of the boats to the history of the Park.<sup>26</sup>

### **John W. Swanson**

Born in Troy, Pennsylvania in 1883, John Swanson moved to Seattle, Washington in 1898. At the age of 13, Swanson built his first boat, the *Flyer*, in 1907. Swanson followed this up with the construction of the twin-screw, steam logging tug, *Westly Wells* in 1908.<sup>27</sup> His love of the Glacier National Park area began the same year during a visit to the foot of Lake McDonald where he noted “that there was no spot more beautiful in the entire state.”<sup>28</sup> Prior to moving his operations to the Glacier area, he operated his own company, the Flathead Boat Construction and Transportation Company. He earned a strong reputation as a master boat builder catering to the growing freight traffic that ran up and down Flathead Lake. At least 11 documented boats constructed by Swanson plied the waters of Flathead Lake. Most were steamers used for hauling machinery and timber. None remain.

Though Swanson's boats ranged up to 350 feet in size, he also made much smaller boats, including rowboats, barges, and scows. The barges he constructed that operated on Flathead Lake were used for a variety of purposes including hauling livestock, lumber, and concrete. In addition to the boats Swanson built for his own use, he constructed several boats on contract for use on Flathead Lake, including two 65-foot vessels for the Somers Lumber Company.<sup>29</sup>

Several stories exist regarding the determination and resourcefulness of Swanson. One story describes the move of one of his large Flathead Lake boats, the *City of Polson*, to Lake McDonald in 1915. Swanson undertook a two-week journey with the assistance of a six-man crew to maneuver the boat via the Flathead River and McDonald Creek. The extremely difficult

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<sup>25</sup> Nancy Woodruff, “Craftsmen Rebuild Park Classic,” *The Daily InterLake*, April 12, 1992. Photocopy provided by the author.

<sup>26</sup> Kennedy, Brian, “Little Chief tour boat returns to St. Mary Lake,” *Hungry Horse News*, July 12, 1990.

<sup>27</sup> White, Thain. “A Brief History of the Steamboating on Flathead Lake in Western Montana, and Roster of Flathead Lake Steamers Etc. 1883-1957.” Thain White Papers. Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana.

<sup>28</sup> Phyllis Clark, “Cap'n Swanson—Boat Builder,” *The Daily Inter Lake*, July 19, 1970.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

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move entailed a roughly 60-mile trip transporting the boat over rapids and sand bars.<sup>30</sup> The ability to complete such a difficult venture demonstrates J. W. Swanson's doggedness and ingenuity. Upon the boat's arrival, he dry-docked it then added ten feet to its length. Rechristening the boat the *Lewtana*, he contracted it out to Frank Kelly and John Lewis.

By 1920, Swanson acquired his own concession in the park, the Glacier Park Boat Company. He operated the company until he sold to Arthur Burch and Carl Anderson in 1938. Not content to solely focus on his boat concession, he purchased, in 1928, 2800 acres of land near Eureka, west of Glacier National Park, and branched out into logging. To make his planed logging operation viable, a bridge was needed to allow the transport of the logs. Showing his craftsmanship extended beyond the construction of boats, he built a 750-foot bridge, which he boasted "...supported 35 to 40 tons, plus the truck weight, and it lasted for 20 years in high water and low."<sup>31</sup>

After his sale of the Glacier National Park concession and boats to Burch and Anderson, Swanson's maritime skills resulted in his employment during World War II as a shipyard supervisor on Terminal Island in Los Angeles Harbor. During his time in California, he continued his boat building activities with the construction of yachts and yacht tenders.<sup>32</sup>

The sale of the concession and boats didn't mark the end of Swanson's activities in Glacier National Park. Near the end of World War II, Swanson returned and assisted Burch with the construction of the 45-foot cedar plank and oak frame vessel, *Big Chief*.<sup>33</sup>

During the latter part of his life, Captain Swanson split his time between Somers, Montana, in the summer and California in the winter. His wife, Emma, an ardent supporter of his boat building profession, passed away in 1964. Captain Swanson passed away at the age of 88 in November, 1971.<sup>34</sup> His importance to the boating history of Glacier National Park is reflected in the words of Phyllis Clark: "Fascinating is the word to describe Cap'n Swanson. Cap'n Swanson has carved his niche in Montana history and will be long remembered...long after the *DeSmet* and *Rising Wolf* make their last excursion trips in Glacier National Park."<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> This story is told by many sources, but Swanson gives a first person telling in the article, "Cap'n Swanson—Boat Builder," *The Daily Inter Lake*, July 19, 1970.

<sup>31</sup> Clark, 1970.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Interviews with Arthur J. Burch's grandsons and current owners of the Glacier Park Boat Company, Art Burch, Jr. and Scott Burch. Fall 2014. Columbia Falls, MT.

<sup>34</sup> "The Daily Inter Lake", November 18, 1971, Kalispell, Montana.

<sup>35</sup> Clark, 1970.



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## 9. Major Bibliographical References

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Holterman, Jack. "Boats in Glacier." Glacier National Park Archives, Ruhle Library, West Glacier, Montana (no date).

Mires, Calvin. "Plying the Waters in America's Little Switzerland: The Role of Turn of the Century Lake Tourism in Glacier National Park." Master's Thesis, East Carolina University, 2005.

### Archives and Collections

Building Maintenance Files. Glacier National Park.  
Series "Concessions," 900. Glacier National Park Historical Records and Central Files. Glacier National Park Archives. West Glacier, MT. (Formerly the Ruhle Library, as mentioned in the footnotes of the original document).

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Glacier National Park Collection, Technical Information Center, Denver, Colorado.

Thain White Collection. Archives and Special Collections. Mansfield Library. University of Montana. Missoula, MT.

**Interviews**

Burch, Arthur and Scott. (grandsons and current owners of the Glacier Park Boat Company). Interview by James Hackethorn, Fall 2014. Columbia Falls, MT.

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**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

- ☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- ☐ previously listed in the National Register
- ☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register
- ☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary location of additional data:**

- ☐ State Historic Preservation Office
  - ☐ Other State agency
  - ☒ Federal agency
  - ☐ Local government
  - ☐ University
  - ☐ Other
- Name of repository: Building Maintenance Files. Glacier National Park

**Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned):** \_\_\_\_\_

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## 10. Geographical Data

**Acreage of Property** less than one

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

### Latitude/Longitude Coordinates (decimal degrees)

Datum if other than WGS84: \_\_\_\_\_

(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

1. Latitude: 48.483188 N Longitude: -113.369686

**Or**

### UTM References

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

☐ NAD 1927 or ☒ NAD 1983

1. Zone: 12	Easting: 324895	Northing: 5372718.9
2. Zone:	Easting:	Northing:
3. Zone:	Easting:	Northing:
4. Zone:	Easting :	Northing:

### Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

As an active vessel, all that area contained within the extreme length and breadth of the vessel, specifically 45 feet in length by 12 feet in width.

### Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundary includes the entire area of the vessel as she floats at her berth. As a movable resource the ship continues to ply the lake and has no significant fixed location; the boundary was selected to encompass the vessel alone.

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## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title: James Cannon Hackethorn  
organization: Glacier Park Boat Company  
street & number: 282 Sunrise Creek Loop  
city or town: Columbia Falls state: MT zip code: 59  
e-mail: jhacketh@gmail.com  
telephone: 406-207-2661  
date: August 2017

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### Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

### Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

### Photo Log

Name of Property:

City or Vicinity:

County:

State:

Photographer:

Date Photographed:

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

1 of \_\_\_\_.

See Continuation Sheets

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

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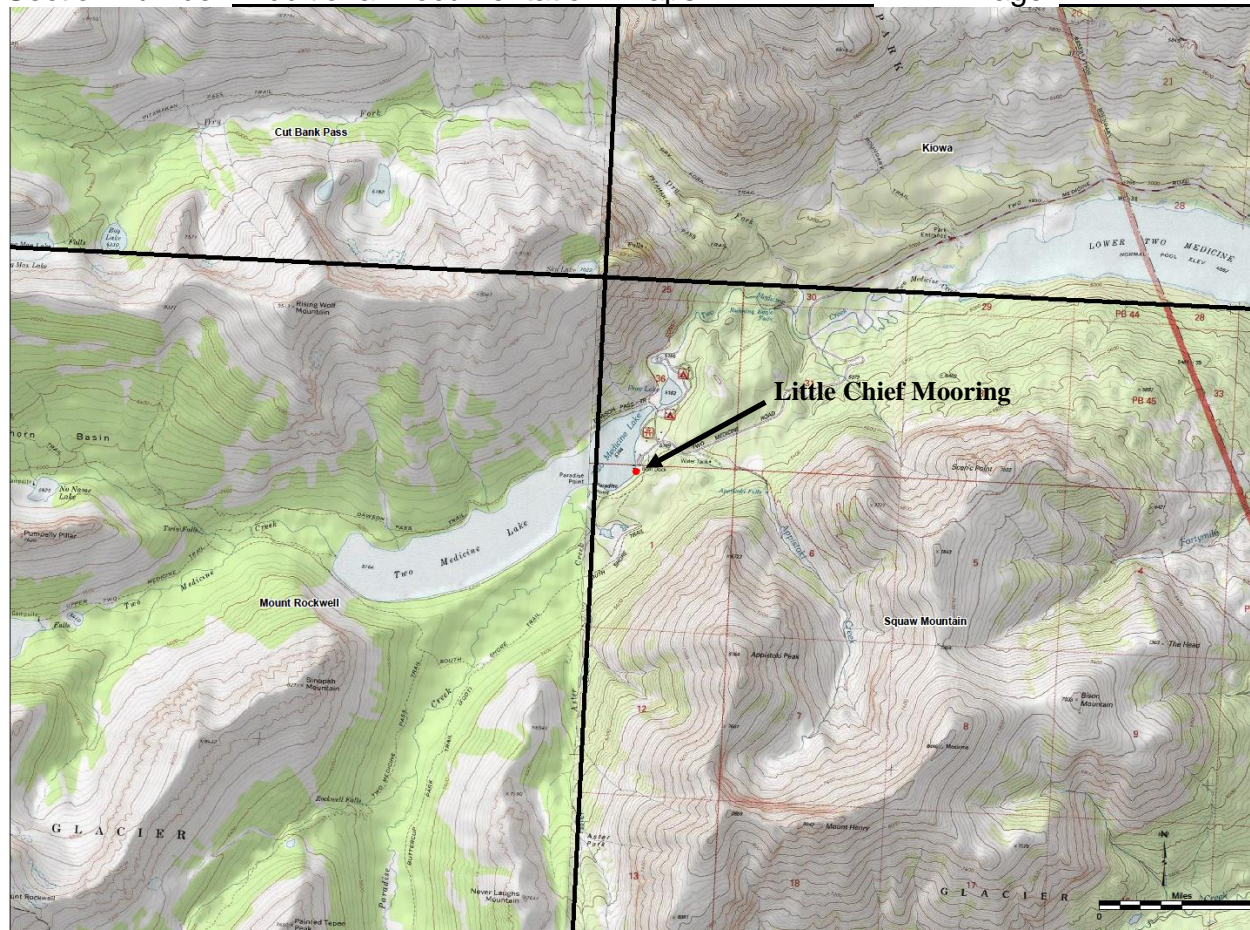
Glacier National Park Multiple Property Listing,

Amended (2016)

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number Additional Documentation--Maps

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Location of *Little Chief* Mooring on Two Medicine Lake, Glacier National Park. Found on the Cut Bank Pass, MT (1968), Mount Rockwell, MT (1968), Squaw Mountain (1968), and Kiowa (1968) 7.5' quadrangle maps.



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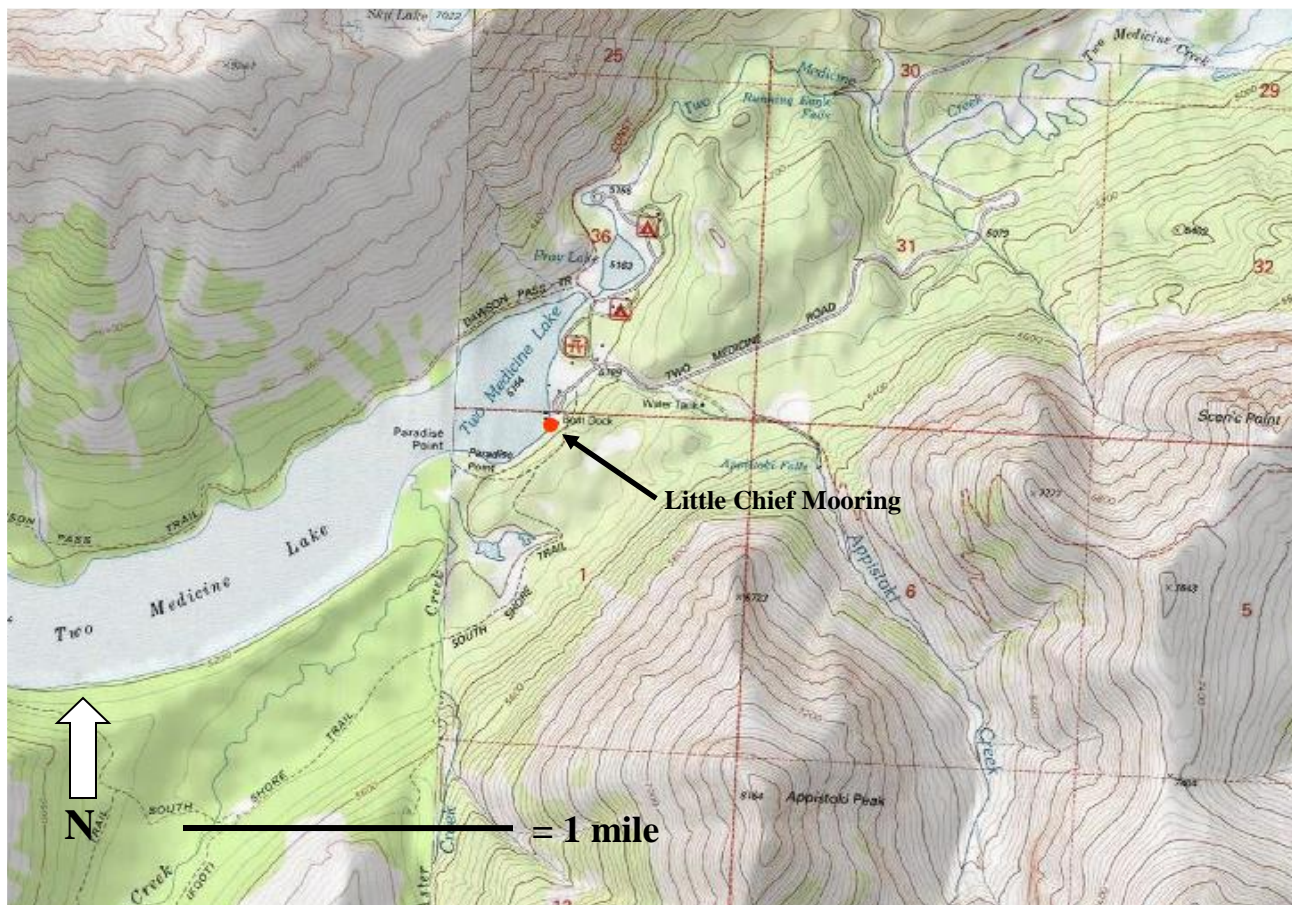
Glacier National Park Multiple

Property Listing, Amended (2016)

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

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Close-up of location of *Little Chief* Mooring on Two Medicine Lake, Glacier National Park. Mooring found on Squaw Mountain, MT (1995) 7.5' quadrangle map.

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Little Chief at St. Mary Chalet dock circa 1933. T. J. Hileman photographer.

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Name of Property: DeSmet

City or Vicinity: Glacier National Park

County: Glacier State: MT

Photographer: Glacier Park Boat Company

Date Photographed: 2014

Description: *Little Chief* (Sinopah) port.

MT\_GlacierCounty\_LittleChief\_0001



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Name of Property: DeSmet

City or Vicinity: Glacier National Park

County: Glacier State: MT

Photographer: Glacier Park Boat Company

Date Photographed: 2014

Description: *Little Chief (Sinopah)*, port view.

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Name of Property: DeSmet

City or Vicinity: Glacier National Park

County: Glacier State: MT

Photographer: Glacier Park Boat Company

Date Photographed: 2014

Description: *Little Chief (Sinopah)*, port view.

MT\_GlacierCounty\_LittleChief\_0003